

Effective Coaching Strategies

Ten strategies you can use to maintain or re-establish a safe, open environment

Coaching Strategies	Definition/Example
1. Contrast to establish clarity	Clarify what you don't want with what you do want (Patterson, et al., 2002). Example: "I don't want you to think I haven't noticed all the extra time you've been putting into the project. I know you are working hard and I appreciate your efforts. I'm not trying to criticize your work. I simply want to ensure we have all the information before we go any farther."
2. Build on areas of agreement	There will be times when you and another person will have conflicting ideas or goals. For instance, your project partner feels strongly about conducting a survey to obtain the necessary information for your project while you feel you'll get better information by looking at existing data. Rather than argue about the merits of each approach to the point that you damage the relationship between the two of you, step back and find the area(s) of agreement. In this case, both of you want your project to include the most relevant information. From this area of agreement, explore all possible solutions. What often happens is that once you open yourself up to the possibilities you find a solution that you hadn't thought of before and that works for both parties.
3. Take responsibility for your emotions	It's common to hear someone say something along the lines of, "He made me so mad!" And yet, can anyone really <i>make</i> you mad? Of course not. Sure, someone may do things that bother you, but how you react to and feel about what the person does is your choice. You'll close down the chances for a safe, open dialogue if you start to blame the other person for how you are feeling or acting.
4. Reflect body language communication	The person may say, "There's nothing wrong," but his/her arms are crossed and he/she appears tense and distracted. In this situation you could reflect what you see by saying, "I know you said there's nothing wrong, but it seems that something may be bothering you. You appear tense and distracted. How can I help?"
5. Avoid "should-ing"	Generally the word "should" brings up feelings of guilt and shame that do not contribute to a safe environment built on mutual respect. Instead of saying, "You shouldn't have done...." calmly say something along the lines of, "That didn't work. What do you think you could do differently in the future?"
6. Feedforward	Rather than re-hash what hasn't worked in the past, simply ask the other person what you could do from this point forward to improve the relationship (Goulston, 2010, pp. 82).
7. Convey Understanding	The phrase, "I bet you feel that..." is a way to empathize with what you think the other person is feeling and convey that you understand what he/she may be going through (Goulston, 2010, pp. 116-122). Example: "I bet you feel that nobody understands what it's like to come to work every day only to be bombarded by project deadline after project deadline. Isn't that right?"
8. Address Hyperbole	Asking sincerely, "Is that something you really believe?" can be an

	<p>effective tool for helping a person caught in hyperbole or hysteria to focus and be more realistic about the issue (Goulston, 2010, pp. 138-141). The key to having this strategy work though is to ask the question calmly with a sincere desire and interest to hear what the other person says. Sarcasm will close down communication. Let's look at one way this tool could be used. In the following exchange an employee is frustrated with a new department policy and complains to his manager.</p> <p><u>Employee:</u> (<i>frustrated</i>) "This has got to be by far the dumbest idea I have ever heard of. I mean come on, how old are we anyway? It's like the Branch Chief thinks we are all in Kindergarten and expects us to go around holding hands and looking both ways before we do anything. You might as well kiss my production rate goodbye because I'm never going to be able to get any work done."</p> <p><u>Manager:</u> (<i>calmly and sincerely</i>) "Is that something you really believe? That you're not going to be able to get any work done as a result of the change? Because if you do, then I need to know about it, and we need to share your concern with the Branch Chief."</p> <p><u>Employee:</u> (<i>sighs and appears less frustrated</i>) "Well, no... I mean... I will get my work done, but I'm just tired of all the new rules every time I turn around."</p> <p><u>Manager:</u> (<i>understandingly</i>) "I see. So, what is it about the new rule that bothers you?" (<i>conversation fades out</i>)</p>
9. Fill in the blanks	<p>This strategy invites the other person to be part of the conversation rather than ask questions that may put him/her on the defensive (Goulston, 2010, p. 171). Example: "You're thinking of leaving the team because_____" (gesture with your hand for the other person to complete the sentence).</p>
10. Prime the conversation	<p>Use this strategy when you feel the other person still has something to say, but is not saying it. When you prime the conversation you take your best guess at what the other person may be feeling or thinking and then share it in a way that lets the other person know it's safe to talk about what's really going on or how he/she really feels (Patterson, et al., 2002, pp. 151-152). Example: "Are you thinking that the only reason I'm asking you to take on this project is because we disagreed on the survey results last month?"</p>

References:

- Goulston, M. (2010). *Just Listen: Discover the Secret to Getting Through to Absolutely Anyone*. New York, NY: American Management Association.
- Patterson, K., Grenny, J., McMillian, R., & Switler, A. (2002). *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.